

CISKEI: THE GREAT SOUTH AFRICAN LIE



Mdantsane is the second-largest township in South Africa. Half-a-million people live there. Every day, the vast majority catch busses or trains into East London, where they work in factories, harbours and railways, producing wealth for white South Africa. Their wages are low, their housing poor, and their children's education is appalling. Bus fares have just risen by 25%. As one domestic worker explained, she earns R50.00 per month. Bus fare now costs her R7.00 per week, or R28.00 per month - more than half her salary. People are desperate; unemployment is soaring. This is the situation faced by the population of Mdantsane. Yet, it is the situation faced by millions of people all over South Africa. So, what is different about Mdantsane?

Mdantsane is different because it is part of that section of South Africa called the Ciskei. The people who live here have been deprived of their citizenship in the country of their birth. They have been deprived of rights in their place of work. They have no access to state security, and little chance of getting pensions, unemployment insurance or workmen's compensation - because they are 'citizens' of an 'independent homeland'. The 'homeland' system in South Africa has proved to be more than a reserve for cheap labour, and a dumping-ground for the unemployed, the sick and those too old or young to work. It has proved to be an instrument of brutal political control.

The kind of 'freedom' that people in the Ciskei experience is no joke. For millions, it means starvation; it means living in terror of the Ciskei police and army; it means leaving your house in the morning not sure of whether you will return to your family in the evening. The reason why people in the Ciskei are living in such fear is because they dared to protest against the rise in bus-fares, and the response from the Ciskei government - which half-owns the bus company - was brutal.

Recent events in the Ciskei have been given little coverage by the commercial press, and, as to be expected, have been ignored by the SABC. For, after all, these events are occurring in 'another country', in a 'sovereign independent state'. And this is where the Great South African Lie comes in. For, although the Bantustan system is seen by the vast majority of people in South Africa - the African population whom it is designed to represent - as a means of control and a cause of suffering, we are still led to accept its legitimacy. So, if eight people were shot dead today in Crossroads or Soweto, the outcry would be enormous. But because it is in the Ciskei that such things are happening, they are seen to be happening 'out there' or 'in another country' - and we can more easily close our eyes.

We must understand that Sebe's actions are P.W. Botha's responsibility. We must understand that the banning of SAAWU is the banning of one of the largest trade-unions in South Africa. We must remember

that the South African security police detain trade-union officials and hand them over to the Ciskei police, and that the Ciskei Army is trained and supplied by the SADF.

As one speaker at a meeting to protest against the situation in the Ciskei said: "Botha is like a dog-owner who teaches his dog to bite, and bite viciously. Then when it bites, he says he is not responsible for its actions. But it is he who taught that dog!"

Robert Gqwetha, branch chair of SAAWU, and brother of Thozamile Gqwetha, SAAWU President who is in hiding, spoke of how hundreds of men and women were taken to the Sisa Dukashe stadium. Women were raped. Men and women were stripped naked, tied up by their hands, and beaten. School-children who were boycotting in protest against the shootings and the detention of some pupils, were herded into the stadium. They were forced to run with their hands above their heads, being beaten while singing "We will not burn our schools any more. Sebe is our leader". Parents who came to demand their children's release were forced to pay - sometimes R100.00 - for their child, with no receipt as record.

At this moment in Ciskei, people are being arrested for not showing on demand their reference books, CNIP (Ciskei National Independence Party) membership cards, or house permits. In the latter case, there is only one such card per household, and thus where there are many members of a household working, they have no protection from the police. Gqwetha described how

house-to-house calls were being made by police. Workers were asked for their SAAWU membership cards or T-shirts, and if they complied, they were arrested. He also described how the police were completely out of control, destroying at random; on one occasion, they had shot ten cows for no reason.

History of the Bus Boycott:

In early July, Gomo transport announced a 25% increase. The people of Mdantsane, who rely on the bus service, could not afford the new fares, and sent a delegation to the company. The company refused to meet them. Nearly all of the ten-person delegation were subsequently detained. On 18 July, a bus boycott began. The Ciskei government began harassing residents to force them to use the busses instead of the trains. Vigilantes and Ciskei police beat up people who refused to board the busses. On August 4, police lined up to prevent people from boarding the trains. They opened fire, killing many. The official figure is seven, but the residents of Mdantsane believe that many more have died. A State of Emergency was declared, with a 10.30 p.m. curfew. Ciskei police arrest or harass anyone who breaks the curfew. Many people have been detained, including officials and organisers from General Workers Union, Food and Canning Workers union, and SAAWU.

The bus boycott continues with more support than ever; in fact, the brutality of the Ciskei regime has served to consolidate support for SAAWU, and opposition to the Sebe regime. Schoolchildren in all the

schools in Mdantsane and in nearby Duncan Village have come out on boycott in solidarity with their parents. Despite the indiscriminate violence perpetrated by the Ciskei police army and the vigilantes, the people of Mdantsane are determined to continue resisting their oppression. Mdantsane has been likened to a war zone—the war being between the people and the rulers of the Ciskei.

Detainees spoke of being kept for days in crowded change-rooms, without food or water. Some were given dog-food pellets to eat. Many claimed that they were systematically tortured and beaten:

"I was tortured for five days at the stadium. I was handcuffed and suspended by my wrists from the rafters of one of the dressing rooms while I was beaten."

"They kept saying: 'Let's finish off these dogs.' They carried on beating us in the changing rooms. They assaulted and abused us for 15 hours. We found many other victims there."

"Without any questions, they hit me with sticks. About eight policemen were hitting me. When they stopped, both my legs were broken. My right foot was dangling. When I tried to stand up, I couldn't."

"The people who assaulted me were adults, and they were sober. They were aware of what they were doing. To me, such people cannot be policemen. They are thugs."

SOME FACTS ABOUT THE CISKEI:

Population: About 700 000. Almost half have been resettled in the past twenty years. There are plans to resettle a further 400 000 there.

Population Density: 126 p.km(sq). (South African population density as a whole is 25 p.km.(sq).)

Unemployment: 35%

Average per capita income: R212 p.a.

65% of per capita income comes from migrant worker remittances.

Output per head in Rural Areas: R40 p.a.

Infant Mortality Rate: Over 50%.

Malnourishment: 50% of all 2 and 3 year olds are malnourished. 3 out of 4 urban children are undersized. 8 out of 10 rural children are undersized.

The Nationalist government has been very clear on one thing during its referendum campaign: the "Homelands System" is non-negotiable. Blacks will never be given rights in their own country. Instead, they are expected to live in barren wastelands such as the Ciskei, under the rule of men like Sebe. It is no wonder that the new constitution, which is premised on the existence of the homelands, is being utterly and totally rejected by all democratic and non-racial organisations in South Africa. Under the banner of the UDF, organisations are uniting to say that they will be satisfied with nothing less than one person, one vote in an undivided South Africa, free from homelands, oppression and exploitation.

WHAT ROLE DO THE 'BANTUSTANS' PLAY IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY?

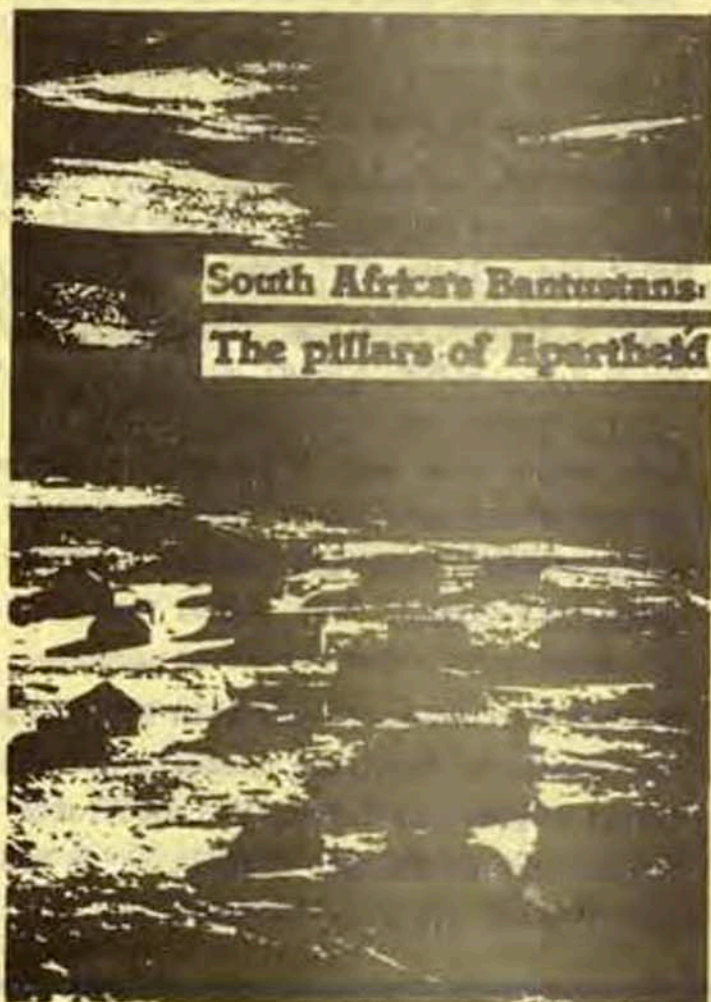
IN WHOSE INTERESTS DO THEY REALLY WORK - THE SEBES AND MATANZIMAS, THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT, MONOPOLY CAPITALISM ?

HOW HAVE THE BANTUSTANS ARISEN HISTORICALLY?

WHAT DOES 'INDEPENDENCE' REALLY MEAN TO PEOPLE LIVING IN THE 'BANTUSTANS' ?.

HOW DOES ALL THIS RELATE TO THE NEW CONSTITUTION?

READ ' SOUTH AFRICA'S BANTUSTANS : THE PILLARS OF APARTHEID.' A NUSAS PUBLICATION AVAILABLE AT SRCS AND STUDENT UNIONS NOW.



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